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The Black Cat

August 1898

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A Ballad of Sapolio.

A young house-maid
Was sore afraid
That her mistress would let her go.
Tho' hard she worked,
And never shirked,
At cleaning she was s-l-o-w.

Now, all is bright,
Her heart is light,
For she's found···· **Sapolio.**

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The Black Cat

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No. 35. AUGUST, 1898. 5 cents a copy. 50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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A Russian Revenge.

BY E. G. CHEVERTON.

AS Helen Winscom stepped from the store of the *coiffeuse* into the brightness and bustle of the boulevard, she felt as guilty as a criminal haunted by the knowledge of a crime. She blamed her own vanity for allowing her to covet the beautiful coil of hair which now so magnificently augmented her scanty tresses thinned by recent illness. She blamed Madame Trèsjeune for her specious argument that the braid was only another shade of red than her own hair, and, "in effect Madame was not really dyeing her hair but making a slight accommodation of the tint." Already her secret seemed everybody's and, though long accustomed to observation and scrutiny, to-day the sidelong glance, the furtive regard, the bolder stare,—all tributes paid to her beauty from her earliest introduction into society,—had the effect of making her blush like a school girl till her whole body pricked and tingled.

To regain her composure she turned to the window of a jewelry store, celebrated even among the *magasins* of Paris for the purity of its gems and the beauty of its trinkets. With her first glance the guilty, half-conscious feeling entirely vanished. She felt that she would have dyed her hair many shades deeper than its natural color, instead of one, to produce an effect so splendid as that given

back by the mirrors lining the windows. Against the pallor of her complexion her hair showed like a sunset on a field of snow. It was a glorified red. Burnished copper barely suggests its beauty and brilliance. It made one think of the morning sun seen, blurred, through a London fog. From these reflections, internal and external, Mrs. Winscom was rudely awakened to the publicity of her position by the appearance of another face in the mirror beside her own; a man's face of dark complexion, framed in a close-clipped pointed beard. Affecting to be interested in examining a bracelet, Helen stooped as if to observe it more closely. When her eyes rose again to the level of the mirror the face was still there. The man seemed to be endeavoring to attract her attention. A well-gloved hand was raised to the beard as if to stroke it, and from the half-closed fingers peeped the edge of a visiting card. As the hand was removed the man's glance dropped significantly to the card and then sought her own eyes with a look of intelligence that was unmistakable. Her face burned with anger as she left the window and pursued her way along the boulevard, walking swiftly, heedlessly, to the first crossing, where she turned and passed to the other side. Gradually she slackened her pace as her irritation subsided, and her mouth softened with a smile as she thought: "How foolish of me to resent a notice invited by my own position! Posing before a mirror in a public street as if —"

She broke off her monologue as her eye caught the curve of a dainty Sèvres vase in a store window. It was a corner store, and its windows fronted on the intersecting avenue as well as on the boulevard, the vase occupying a pedestal in the angle of the window and being visible from either approach. As she looked she felt, against her will, her eyes slowly drawn up from the vase until they met those of the man she had recently encountered at the jeweler's. Standing now on the avenue, he was gazing at her directly through the angle of the window. Again he held the card in his hand, but this time more openly as his position permitted. With a glance which was meant to be annihilating she turned from the window and signaled one of the ubiquitous fiacres which was just then passing. "To the Hotel Mazarin," she commanded as she entered, and then recoiled, half stupefied

by the appearance, at the window of the vehicle, of the persistent stranger who had evidently listened to her directions. But anger overcame her astonishment when, covering the act with a bow, he managed to toss a card into her lap. Seizing the card at the instant it touched her dress she tore it violently in two and dashed the pieces in the man's face just as the cab, starting forward with a jerk, threw her breathless against the cushions.

"The wretch!" she cried, panting with indignation. "And he heard me give my address. Fortunately he doesn't know my name. But is there another woman in the hotel with hair like mine? I wish the hotel might be full of women with every shade of red hair! No, not my shade," she added, her vanity reviving, "but a shade near enough to confuse the man who attempted to describe me by the color of my hair."

Gradually, however, as the carriage rolled along the smooth pavement the monotonous motion tranquilized her nerves, putting her in a mood to accept an explanation of the man's conduct which entirely restored her good humor. He was probably some artist who saw in her the exact type of model he required for a work that was to make his fame and fortune, and who had grasped at the opportunity to obtain her address in this unconventional manner. She had invited notice, she told herself, by her persistence in running about Paris unattended when the friend on whose entertainment and chaperonage she had depended proved inopportunely absent. And anyway the whole affair amounted to nothing, as probably at that very moment there awaited her at the hotel the telegram she expected summoning her to meet the Bronsons in prosaic, respectable London. She found the telegram as she hoped, together with a note which she left unopened until she discovered that the message, dated from Amsterdam, read: —

"Arrive in London Saturday. Join us at the Metropole. Answer.

AMELIA BRONSON."

After ringing for a telegraph blank, she seated herself at the table and, taking up the note, scrutinized the address curiously, trying vainly to place the writer. When at last she broke the seal a piece of card fluttered to the floor. A blank card it

proved, except for a faint mark like the flourish sometimes attached to the final letter of a name, but on the other piece, which she found in the envelope, were traced certain curiously shaped characters; they might, she thought, be Chinese or Hebrew. Once more she examined the address, but the writing — a feminine running hand in which the M's might be W's or W's M's — was absolutely unfamiliar. Another and more careful scrutiny of the card showed that there was a slight soil on the back, as if it had been dropped on the street and rubbed with a handkerchief. Instantly there flashed upon her mind the recent cab episode. Obviously this was the card she had torn and thrown in the face of her annoyer. Her theory of the artist, then, was wrong. But what could these symbols mean? And why was not the soiled card replaced by a clean one?

She tossed the pieces on the floor as a knock at the door announced the bearer of the telegraph blanks. But the message sent, she could not put the episode from her mind. To meet her friends as appointed, it was not necessary to leave Paris until tomorrow. But her shopping was done. Why expose herself longer to this mysterious annoyance? Why not go at once and put the channel between her and the man with the card?

Another glance at the puzzling bits of pasteboard changed her uncertainty to resolution. So it happened that while her telegram to her friends announced that she would meet them on Saturday, by noon on Friday she was safely and comfortably lodged in the Metropole, and inclined to be satisfied with everything, even the rainy day which made it the easier for her to decide to remain in the hotel and take a thorough rest in preparation for the sight-seeing which would follow the arrival of the Bronsons.

Returning from luncheon, she had just disposed herself for a comfortable afternoon when a caller was announced. Her first thought, that some friend from home might be staying at the same hotel, was banished by a glance at the card which bore the name of Mr. Woodford, representing Mills & Curry, Bankers, and agents for Brownlow & Co., who had issued her letter of credit. Had the firm failed? The feeling of panic which seized her at the thought brought her, almost breathless, to the reception room, empty except for a gentleman who rose and bowed as she entered.

He was of middle height and thick figure, with a round head and coarse, black hair brushed straight back from a low forehead. His greenish eyes had a feline look which was intensified by a smile which bared a set of white teeth to the gums. When he spoke it was with the precision of a foreigner, somewhat slowly, but with a good accent. He bowed and seated himself in response to Helen's slight inclination as she took a chair by a small center table.

"You are Mr. Woodford?" said Helen, as she laid the card on the table and looked inquiringly at her visitor.

"Ah, pardon," he said; "I found myself lacking a card, so I wrote my name on the back of a business card I chanced to have. It is this that I should have presented."

Very quietly he laid on the table before her a piece of pasteboard the sight of which held her spellbound. For before her eyes, the torn parts neatly joined, was the card she had thrown on the floor of her room in the Hotel Mazarin!

Without a word she looked from the bit of pasteboard to its bearer. He was observing her intently, but bore no resemblance to the man who had followed her in Paris. With an increasing instinct of distrust she took up the banker's card again and turned it over. Before she could decipher the penciled characters on the back he spoke again: —

"Let me save Madame the trouble. My name is Sergius Pushkin, and I call to ask if Madame will be pleased to tell me how she became possessed of the card she left in the Hotel Mazarin. One moment, Madame!" as Mrs. Winscom turned as though to leave the room without a word. "You challenge my right to put the question? It is the right of one holding office under the Russian government, who recognizes on the card you left behind, certain Russian characters, written in a peculiar manner, one over the other, and used by Nihilists to convey to one of their number a warning of approaching danger."

"But I am not a Nihilist. I am an American woman traveling abroad for my health, and temporarily separated from my party," said Helen. And then stung with the desire to baffle this evil-eyed inquisitor, she said more calmly: "As for the card, I found it on my table in an envelope addressed to me. I

could not understand it and tore it in two. It is for you to explain why I received it."

The Russian smiled his wolfish smile. "It is very easy to explain," he said quietly. "Madame bears the most striking resemblance to a Russian woman named Olga Oblowsky, who sometime ago escaped from Siberia. She was distinguished for the color and beauty of her hair, which was of the same wonderful shade as Madame's, and it was owing to her *chevelure* that Madame was mistaken for the Russian by my agents, who summoned me to Paris. Upon my arrival I discovered that further inquiry had disclosed the supposed Olga Oblowsky to be an American lady traveling abroad — as you have stated. But when Madame left Paris her room was examined, the card found, and as it seemed to lend some color to an improbable theory, I followed Madame to London for this interview."

"But how did you know my address?" Helen asked.

"Madame has been in communication with her friends. It is not difficult to read telegrams. Ah!" as his companion turned to the door with only the faintest inclination of dismissal, "Madame desires to say no more?"

"I am not a spy in the employ of the Russian government," said Helen coldly, with a marked accent on the pronoun.

"Madame has the valuable qualification of reticence," he answered her, with a sneer which the display of his teeth seemed to render into a snarl. "I have the honor to wish Madame a good day." And with a profound bow he left the room.

The visit of the Russian, the new light thrown on the card episode in Paris, so thoroughly aroused Mrs. Winscom that she found it impossible to carry out her purpose of resting when she regained her room. Against her will her mind occupied itself entirely with this mysterious Russian woman so like herself, even to the hair. At the thought of this point of resemblance a horrible idea came to her.

What if this woman had been murdered and her hair sold! Pacing the room she stopped before the mirror, and it seemed to her excited fancy that this rare red of her hair was the red of blood.

A sharp knock at the door set her heart beating suffocatingly, and the appearance of the familiar blue telegram envelope by no

means reassured her, suggesting, as it did, that something had happened to the Bronsons. What had happened proved nothing but an enforced delay, which would postpone her friends' arrival until Monday, but in her present state of mind two days of solitude and retirement assumed the shape of a catastrophe. At one and the same time she was possessed by the desire to go somewhere, see something, and weighed down by the thought of venturing out on a solitary expedition. All the usual sights enumerated in Baedeker or the newspapers seemed stale and unprofitable without companionship, and yet the four walls of her room oppressed her unbearably.

Dinner came and found her still unsettled and irresolute. Then, impatient with herself, she decided on seeing Irving in his revival of "The Bells" at the Lyceum, and gave a hurried order for a ticket and carriage, in order that she might not have time to change her mind. To drive directly to the theater and back again seemed to insure herself against any farther annoyances; and yet, bored and restless as she felt, she was more than once on the point of countermanding her orders and spending the evening by her open grate with a good book.

Once in the carriage, however, and driving slowly through the foggy streets, she felt her spirits rising. It would be good to sit in the warm, brilliant theater and know those fog waves were beating helplessly against its walls. The play pleased her in prospect, and to be the sole occupant of a box promised novelty.

The fog made the progress of the carriage slow, and the curtain had risen when she entered the theater. There was a crowded house. In the interval between the first and second acts Helen was conscious that she was attracting some notice, and markedly from a man on the other side of the house. Raising her opera glasses, she carelessly let her glance range over the audience until the opposite box came into the field of vision. She was rewarded by a smile that bared the white teeth of Sergius Pushkin. She did not look in his direction again, but she felt the glance she would not meet, and its persistence was so entirely insolent that she found it hard to keep her mind on the action of the piece. The fascination of the play at length swept the Russian from her thoughts. Toward the close of the last scene she was aware of a slight stir in the opposite box. Looking across, she saw that a

man had entered and was carrying on a whispered conversation with the occupant. In a moment more Pushkin rose. As he left following the messenger, he turned and flashed one glance toward Helen. She had covered him with her glass as he retired, and when he turned, his look fell full on her own. It was a look she never forgot, so full was it of mingled hate and brutal triumph.

With an involuntary shiver she laid down the glass. The recognition of the Russian and the thoughts suggested by the little hint he had given of his mission — that he might be assisting in a tragedy quite as terrible as that on the stage — lent intensity to the closing scenes of the play, and she was conscious of more than usual excitement as the curtain fell.

It was slow work leaving the theater. Added to the ordinary crush was the annoyance of the fog, out of which, above the bustle and rattle, rumbled an occasional shout of warning; so that it was with a feeling of relief that Helen heard her carriage announced, and groping her way through the dimness stepped quickly into it and sank upon the cushions, closing her eyes wearily. After the strain of the evening the relaxation was so grateful that she hardly noticed that the carriage still delayed. But the next moment the opening of the door brought her back to the world, and before she could utter a protest a veiled figure entered, and was seated, and Helen found herself being driven rapidly away, with an unknown woman as companion. For just a moment her overwrought nerves quivered so that it seemed the tension must find relief in a scream. But her natural coolness, and a swift remembrance of the many chances that the encounter might be a mistake, calmed her.

"I beg your pardon," she said steadily; "in the fog you perhaps entered the wrong — "

But before she could finish, her companion broke in upon her.

"No," she said quietly, in a voice whose gentle modulations attested her breeding, "it is no mistake. I have deliberately intruded, but on a matter of life and death."

With a half-despairing gesture she drew aside her veil.

Involuntarily Helen shrank back. "It is — " she said, and stopped, choked.

"Yes," said the other sadly, "it is Olga Oblowsky. You shrink from me. I do not blame you. Sergius has already visited you. You have seen me through his eyes of evil."

"No," said Helen, "that man's opinion would carry no weight with me, even if he had done more than suggest a remarkable resemblance between us."

"And he told you that your hair was wonderfully like mine, did he not? The exact counterpart in color?"

"Yes, he laid special stress on that feature of resemblance," Helen answered, feeling very uncomfortable, for she wondered what this woman would say if she knew why her hair so greatly resembled her own.

"Madame," said Olga, leaning forward and stretching out a little hand which Helen involuntarily clasped, "I have intruded myself on you to ask a great favor. I hardly know how to ask, and yet because you are from the free land America, and are of that people, brave, generous, and warm of heart, I find courage. Ah, do not fear me!" as Helen, reminded of the strangeness of the interview and her slight knowledge of the petitioner, unclasped her hand from that of the Russian; "I do not say that my request is reasonable. Indeed, it will seem to you ridiculous. Yet I have risked my liberty and my life only to ask you for that coil of hair you bought in Paris, and which you are wearing to-night."

Dazed by the singularity of a request so different from the petition for practical assistance she had expected, Helen stammered: "But why--but what—" when the thought that had previously occurred to her after her interview with Pushkin made her break off and say, "Is it your hair?"

"It *was* mine," Olga replied.

"You sold it and want it back again?" Helen inquired.

"I want it again," Olga said, ignoring the first part of the question, "and believe me, it is no woman's whim. The dearest hope of my heart depends on Madame's answer. And it must be quick. We go slowly, but we are going too far for me. Life is at stake."

There was a passion of eagerness in the Russian woman's voice, in the face peering forward, the gesture of the outstretched hands,

that moved Helen out of herself. Without stopping to think of reasons or consequences she threw back the hood of her cloak, and with fingers that trembled slightly loosened the braid from her head and gave it to the woman.

With a little cry of gratitude Olga seized Helen's hand and kissed it. At the same time she laid a somewhat bulky envelope in her lap. "In this," she said, "is a letter which will explain all to you." As she spoke, as if in response to some signal, the carriage drew up to the edge of the pavement, and before it had fairly come to a standstill the door was opened by some one from without and quickly closed again after Olga's hasty exit. As her carriage started forward Helen lifted the curtain of the little window at her back and saw the dull gleam of lamps as a cab was turned around and vanished like a phantom in the fog. Indeed, the whole interview would have seemed merely a phantasy but for the envelope which she clasped anxiously during the rest of a seemingly interminable drive, — longing, yet fearing, to open it before she should be in the haven of her own room. When she had finally reached that shelter and locked the door she did not even wait to remove her opera cloak before tearing open the mysterious envelope. As she withdrew the folded sheets from their cover there dropped to the floor two five-pound Bank of England notes. She laid these in her lap and began to read.

"Madame," the letter ran, "if you should ever read these lines which I am penning in haste and uncertainty, you will perhaps find in them the explanation of and apology for events that forego their reception. Our plans are made. The atmosphere leagues with us. To-night will see me again a captive or —. But it is my story, the history of my past, Madame, that I want to tell. If I succeed, the rest will be told you by others. I was born noble. My father was an officer of the Court, and my twin brother, Nicholas, was also high in the service of the Tzar. We were alike, my brother and I, in height and features, in the remarkable color of our hair, and our minds were as closely akin as our bodies. When this brother became interested in the new teaching and was admitted to the circle of Nihilism, he did not tell me. It was the first reserve of his life from me. But I soon

guessed the secret, and while I accepted his faith, and believed with him, I was terrified for the danger to him and to the family through him. I lived in daily expectation of the blow that was sure to fall. And in due time it came. There was a high official of police, Sergius Pushkin, who paid me court and offered me marriage. I refused him, and he yet made himself offensive to me by attentions I could not resent.

"One day he called and requested to see me alone. My impulse was to refuse. But a sudden fear for Nicholas made me yield, and I received him. Then, like the cunning hound he was, he unfolded his mission. For long he had suspected my brother of Nihilism. He had watched him, trapped him, spied on him, until he had accumulated undoubted evidence of his complicity in a plot against the Tzar. Through my brother the whole family was liable. We were absolutely in Pushkin's hands. Ruin, Siberia, death, confronted me in the form of this wretch with his smooth tongue and wolf smile. I divined in a moment his motive in this interview. I was to pay with myself the price of his secret. It was I, then, who approached the subject. 'You would not have discovered this plot,' I said, 'if I had accepted your offer of marriage.' 'If I were of the Excellency's family,' he answered, with that sneering smile of his, 'I should not involve myself in the ruin of my own kin.' 'My alternative, then,' I replied, 'is to be yours or to see my family ruined and sent to the mines.' 'Your perception does you credit,' was his answer. 'Then,' I said, 'I accept your proposition of marriage, with the provision that you not only withdraw my brother's name from those connected with this plot, but protect him in the future should occasion arise.' 'Your pardon,' he sneered; 'we go too quickly. I do want you to be mine. But this time I have not proposed marriage. You rejected my former offer with scorn. Now you are in my power, and I do not choose to pay the price of my liberty for what I can get at a cheaper rate.'

"The insolence of his tone added to the vileness of his language. In a passion of rage I ran toward him and struck him on the face. 'You Mongol hound!' I cried. 'I will not insult my race with another thought of you. Better that it should perish from the earth than that a taint of your foul blood should mark

and mar the strain.' The blood flushed his face at my blow. His eyes glared; his hands clinched convulsively. When he spoke, the suppressed passion of his voice made me shrink away from him in terror at my act.

"'I give you one moment for decision,' he said. 'You anticipate delay, time after my departure to warn your brother and your father. There will be no time for warning. My men are at the doors. Every avenue is guarded. I have but to make a signal from this window,' — he crossed to the window as he spoke, and pulled aside the draperies — 'and your last hope is gone.' 'Make your signal, then,' I gasped; 'you are not my last hope or any hope, I will appeal to the Tzar.'

"Before my sentence was finished he had fluttered his handkerchief at the window. In an instant, it seemed, the house was in the possession of the police. I was given into custody, and hurried away to a place of detention. The servants were placed under arrest, my father's papers were seized, and he himself and my brother made prisoners when they entered the house accustomed to shelter them. I never saw them again. They were both condemned to the mines. My father died heartbroken on the journey. My brother was shot in an attempt to escape his guards. But I had yet an offer of liberty. My persecutor came again and renewed his proposition, promising even yet to save my father, and mitigate the punishment of my brother by his influence. I need not repeat my answer. I waited for my own turn to be tried and marched to the mines. But the trial never came. One day my head was shorn. The morning following I was taken to another cell, and confronted with my enemy. He bade me remove my clothes for punishment. While I stared at him, scarce understanding, a guard seized my arms, and my wrists were made fast to rings in the wall. They stripped my clothing to the waist, and I cowered in shame against the shielding stones. Then Sergius Pushkin, rubbing his rude hand across my shoulders, said: 'It is a pity to cut up such soft flesh with the harsh whip. See, we have made a whip that should suit my dainty lady's skin.'

"As he spoke, he took a knout from an assistant and held it before my eyes. It was my own hair twisted into a cruel whip made thick and hard by a treatment of grease, and flashing here

and there with the gleam of bits of metal that were to bite into the body. (My back is scarred forever by the furrows made by that whip.) But I will spare you details. Enough that I received my punishment, and entered on my journey to the mines. The friends who failed to effect the escape of my brother were successful in their plans for me. Since then I have lived in Switzerland and in Holland, taking my brother's place in the Councils of the friends of Russia. I have bided my time to strike a blow for the cause, and the time has come. It is for this I make my appeal to you. The executioner sold the knout of hair to a trader, and through him it went to Paris. Search was being made for it when you purchased it, and it was one of our friends who, never having seen me, and mistaking you for me, from the description given of me, tried to warn you of the vigilance of Sergius Pushkin, when you were in Paris."

Here the letter broke off abruptly. Only a line or two in pencil hastily and irregularly scrawled below begged acceptance of the accompanying bank notes in recompense for Helen's outlay for the braid.

As she read the closing words Helen let the letter fall into her lap. Her excited mind seemed to read the sequel to the story in flashes of lightning. She remembered the summons of Sergius from his box at the theater, and guessed at the impending catastrophe, — a struggle between the hunter and his game, the spy and the brotherhood. What was to be the result? Was Sergius apprised by his agent of the woman's movements? She felt sure, now, that such was the case. And she had not thought to tell Olga of the presence of Pushkin at the theater, or his abrupt departure. She had been cold, hard, selfish; had uttered no word of warning, made no proffer of help; had left her to fall again into the hand of that wretch. If she had only warned this woman! If she could only warn her now! There was an exaggeration of self-accusation in her thoughts due in part to her overwrought condition. Do what she would, she could not escape the feeling that she had failed a deeply wronged woman in her extremity. Worn out at last, she went to bed, but only to see in panoramic procession the events in the Russian woman's history. At length she fell into a troubled slumber, to wake with a scream from a

dream of a Russian dungeon, and her own flesh quivering under the knout.

It was early morning, but she could not sleep again, so she rose, and in a lounging robe sat by the window listening to the growing noises of the city. Presently she heard the shrill cry of a newsboy. "All about the 'orrible Russian murder in Bermondsey. Special edition." The blood rushed all over her at the sound. This was the last act in the tragedy. The woman she rode with last night was dead, murdered by that hound. Was there no justice, no help? She rose and pushed the electric button. She must know the truth, and set her mind at rest. It was some time before the astonished servant brought her the paper she had ordered. As she opened the damp sheet she saw in staring headlines: —

A RUSSIAN VENGEANCE.

SERGIUS PUSHKIN,

A RUSSIAN OFFICER OF POLICE,

FOUND MURDERED IN

A ROOM IN BERMONDSEY.

STRANGLED WITH A BEAUTIFUL TRESS

OF WOMAN'S HAIR.

KNOUTED BEFORE DEATH.

The paper fell from Helen's hand, and she sank back in her chair in a swoon.

In the private drawer in Mrs. Winscom's desk in her home in New York are Olga Oblowsky's letter and two five-pound Bank of England notes. On the other side of the Atlantic, in the cabinet of criminal curiosities at Scotland Yard, hangs a long tress of woman's hair. Its color is red, it is stiffened and matted as if with some greasy substance, and close scrutiny shows, here and there, some strips of rusty metal. Thus far apart are the first and last links in the chain of a Russian revenge.

Poole, of Bethesda.

BY FRANK E. CHASE.

THE wholly disproportionate influence of an ill-fitting collar or an unblacked shoe in determining the conduct of the human race at critical moments has long been noticed by philosophers with deep humiliation. That mere personal discomfort or a sense of incongruity in appearance, working inward upon the souls of men of stern resolve, should be capable of eclipsing their courage and impeding their acts is a most mortifying reflection, but that a general in tight boots, or a diplomatist who, in a fit of absence of mind, had combined the sack coat of leisure with the silk hat of ceremony, would inevitably fall far short of their customary performance, cannot for a moment be denied.

To such suggestions, John Poole, as a consequence of hereditary influences which were widely discussed in the leading medical journals a few years ago, and therefore need not now be considered, presented a fairly thermometric sensibility. What was to other men a merely occasional experience was the habit of his life, the variegated moods and conduct of which were determined solely by his associations and environment. Like the chameleon, he took his color from the nearest object, and retained it only so long as he was under its influence.

It need not be explained, perhaps, that a person so constituted had never made a glittering success of business. It followed quite naturally that he had tried many pursuits, and he was still trying them in obedience to all sorts of external promptings when the sudden death of both his parents left him alone in the world, and so far independent of personal exertions as the very smallest of incomes would permit. Under these circumstances he drifted into absolute idleness, less through any decision of his own than because of a general disinclination on the part of the citizens of

Bethesda, where he lived, to aid him in his kaleidoscopic experiments in bread-winning.

But if Poole had been found unsatisfactory in business relations, he succeeded in partly redeeming himself by the success with which he performed his social duties, and by the unfailing sympathy and good nature which he displayed in the trying relations of neighborly association. Very popular was he, for these excellent reasons, with the ladies of Bethesda, and with none more so than with Miss Mehitable, an estimable spinster whose family name had been so long disused in the familiar intercourse of a small community as to have been half forgotten, and was chiefly treasured by the lady herself as something which she still hoped to give in exchange for the name of Poole.

It was quite characteristic of the owner of this coveted patronymic that he had conducted almost from boyhood one of these protracted courtships which are so common a feature of New England rural life. Every one in Bethesda knew and had always known of John Poole's attachment for Miss Mehitable, and Miss Mehitable's mild passion for John Poole was one of the most cherished sentimental traditions of the place. Yet what was freely mentioned by every one else had never become a topic of conversation between the two persons most nearly concerned; and so, though Miss Mehitable, whose comfortable home and income, to say nothing of her comely self, would have supplied an ample incentive to most men, had been calmly and unemotionally expectant for years, John had never been able to make up his mind to speak.

The income which this tardy lover enjoyed by inheritance from his parents barely sufficed to provide for his bed and board, and afforded no margin for any of the luxuries of life, nor even for the item of clothing which a New England climate and polite convention unite in making indispensable to human well-being. Thus it happened that he depended entirely for the comfort and adornment of his person upon the occasional contributions of two of his more prosperous kinsmen, who lived in a distant city. This circumstance was, as a matter of course, not much enlarged upon by Poole in conversation with his fellow-citizens, and so was not generally known.

Of these two benefactors, one, the Rev. Babblington Brooke,

presided most successfully over a rich and fashionable congregation, with whom he was in great favor and esteem. His predominating characteristic was timidity, externally manifested by extreme diffidence of manner and a mildness of opinion and utterance that verged upon inanity. Under the sway of this temperamental defect, in which his kinship to Poole was subtly manifested, he was prone to enlarge in his discourses upon the spiritual rewards of virtue, and to emphasize as little as possible the disconcerting *post-mortem* possibilities of wrong doing; all of which tended strongly toward popularity with his fashionable congregation, and partly atoned for the soothing dulness of his sermons.

The other kinsman who contributed to the adornment of Poole's outer man stood in that contradictory relation to the rest of his family which professional breeders of the lower animals tersely describe as "a hit." Mr. Torrent B. Rivers, or "Torry," as he was widely and affectionately known in political circles, partook of none of the peculiarities of his kindred, but had originated for himself an entirely independent set of traits. His character presented an atavistic accumulation of all the dispersed self-confidence of his race, which reappeared in his positive and pugnacious person in incredible volume and intensity. Decision of character had, in fact, become a vice in Mr. Rivers, whose cocksureness was never in the least impaired by the circumstance that his decisions were almost invariably wrong ones. This last peculiarity had made the commercial experiments of his early life quite as disastrous to himself and to others as had been those of his relative, Poole, and had finally narrowed the field of his endeavors down to politics, which he had embraced as a last resort with characteristic energy. His services in this field had been finally rewarded by a grateful country with a fat position in the Custom House, where his proneness to err only excited the uninfluential indignation of European tourists.

It was the Rev. Babblington Brooke's charitable practise to make up a box of little gifts and creature comforts when Christmas day came around, and to send it with a kind and cheering letter, conveying the compliments of the season, to his poor relative, Poole. And with these mere superfluities he never failed to enclose a liberal selection of his own cast-off clothing, strongly

tinctured by long and close association with his person, with the shyness which was his distinguishing characteristic. Actuated by a similar generous impulse, Mr. "Torry" Rivers had also fallen into the habit of sending, every Fourth of July, with a jug of seasonable punch made after his own private and much-coveted recipe, an assortment of his own disused garments, which even when hanging aimlessly in the closet offered strong and unmistakable suggestions of their original owner's bristling and emphatic personality. By a fortunate accident the clothing of both these gentlemen fitted Poole to a nicety, and made the mediation of the local tailor, whose indiscreet tongue might otherwise have babbled this harmless secret to the curious world of Bethesda, quite superfluous.

No man is aware of his own weaknesses, and so it was quite as unaccountable to Poole as to his townsmen that every year about Christmas time he took to church going, eschewed bad language, and became in all respects a model citizen. A painful shyness characterized his manner at this season, and a mild optimism tinctured his opinions so far as he ventured to express them. Neatly clad in a sober suit whose principles had been originally formed upon the impeccable person of the Rev. Babblington Brooke, he walked mildly forth, clad in righteousness as in a supernumerary garment.

At such seasons Miss Mehitable's gentle affection for him took on a warmer tinge, and she began to shyly wonder if, by any happy chance, this change of heart might be preliminary to the long-deferred declaration. At such times, too, the advantages of domestic life and the comeliness of Miss Mehitable's person roused a strange riot in John Poole's heart, and strongly suggested to him the desirability of embracing both these objects. But, alas! at these precise seasons he was utterly incapacitated by the dominating influence of the parson's clothes for anything like so bold and decisive a step, and so the word remained unspoken. Opportunity was not lacking, for during the reign of the Brooke raiment they met constantly at church sociables and in the Sunday school, where Poole usually took charge of the Bible class; but not even this association, so influential, as a rule, in forcing the tender plant of love to an early bloom, brought matters to a head.

The coming of Mr. "Torry" Rivers's annual jug of punch on the Fourth of July always marked a change in Poole's habits which was wrongly, but not unnaturally, ascribed by local criticism to the demoralizing effects of that potent fluid. Freshly clad in a neat summer suit, also contributed by that bold and roistering benefactor, he walked the streets of Bethesda a changed man. The consumption of the punch — which in his normal state he held in utter loathing — was only a detail of his altered moral condition, under which the late pillar of the church and model of the social virtues turned instinctively to the excitements of the local trotting park, and, upon occasion, took a skilled hand in the game of poker, the laws of which were studied with far greater industry than were the Revised Statutes in the attorney's office over the village bank, and were, perhaps, a source of greater profit to its proprietor. Saturated with the spiritual essence of the dissolute Rivers, John Poole passed through a kind of moulting period of manners, out of which that once shy bird emerged, loud as to voice, gaudy as to plumage, profane as to conversation, bold and truculent in manner — the admiration of the sporting element of Bethesda.

To Miss Mehitable this annual change brought dismay and discouragement. Her sincere affection for the John Poole of the winter and spring was quite unable to extend itself to this changeling, from which she turned in disgust. Thus, though Poole's attachment for her, at once strengthened and emboldened by the subtle influences emanating from the raiment of Mr. Torrent B. Rivers, energetically sought to declare itself, Miss Mehitable stubbornly refused to afford an opportunity for it to do so. All the summer long, carefully arrayed in the most tasteful and striking combinations provided by Rivers's ex-wardrobe, did John Poole seek the lady of his life-long choice. From picnic to lawn party, from yachting excursion to moonlight drive, he constantly pursued his end with an energy and skill which Miss Mehitable as constantly contrived to baffle and defeat. The husking bees of the autumn and the sleighing parties of the early winter were for John Poole battle-fields of love from which he retired beaten and discomfited.

This unsatisfactory state of affairs had gone on for many years,

and might have gone on forever had it not been for two events which were chronicled almost simultaneously in the city papers, whose accounts of them were read by Poole in distant Bethesda with deep concern, but with slight appreciation of their full bearing upon his own circumstances.

The Rev. Babblington Brooke was replaced in his comfortable pulpit by a younger and more attractive clergyman, and Mr. Torrent B. Rivers, through an overturn in politics, lost his position in the Custom House and was again thrown upon a cold world. Brooke characteristically dried up in the face of this disaster and retired to the editorial room of a religious newspaper at an exiguous salary, while Rivers overflowed his banks in a freshet of disgusted dissipation and presently died. The immediate practical result of these lamentable events was the cessation of the annual box of clothes from both sources.

The full effect of this privation was not immediately felt by John Poole, as he had on hand a closet full of available garments, melancholy mementoes of both his benefactors, when the sad news came to him. But in a year or so these had succumbed to the erosive effects of time and their wearer's sedentary habits, and upon a certain fateful Christmas morning he discovered with pain that the trousers of the last remaining suit of the Rev. Babblington Brooke had irremediably given out, as even so meek and lowly a thing as trousers will do if too industriously sat upon. There was still left to him, however, a pair of pantaloons that had once graced the energetic legs of the late T. B. Rivers, and though these were somewhat incongruous in effect, he was fain to put them on in the interests of propriety.

Never in his life had he felt so distracted in mind as he did that morning when he went down to breakfast. Wild and contradictory impulses chased one another through his brain, and his conversation was remarked upon afterwards as having teemed with strange inconsistencies. He ate the dropped egg, which was the invariable overture to his day, with a languid appetite, and more than once during the progress of the meal his landlady was startled to feel his foot pressing upon hers underneath the table. A more or less pronounced tendency toward such blandishments usually characterized Poole's behaviour during his swash-buckling

summer season, but such a demonstration in the winter was a great surprise to his landlady, who, however, passed it over in silence.

As he was finishing his coffee a parcel arrived by a messenger. He opened it with pleased curiosity, for parcels and he had been strangers for many months; and when he had removed the innermost wrapper of tissue paper, there lay upon his knees, with the gaudy but determined pantaloons of "Torry" Rivers by way of background, a beautiful pair of embroidered slippers — a Christmas gift from Miss Mehitable.

Without a word he pushed back his chair, rose, and, putting on his hat and overcoat, left the house and walked rapidly in the direction of Miss Mehitable's pleasant home. An agony of shyness possessed his mind, still thoroughly under the sway of the cast-off coat of the diffident Brooke, but all the energy of the deceased Custom House officer seemed to have passed into his sole remaining pantaloons, as if by legitimate inheritance, and resistlessly urged forward the reluctant legs of their present occupant. A cold perspiration of fear streamed down his face, overshadowed by the hat of the timid parson, and his throat, encircled by the collar of that shrinking ecclesiastic, was parched with apprehension. But still his resolute and unflinching legs bore him swiftly on.

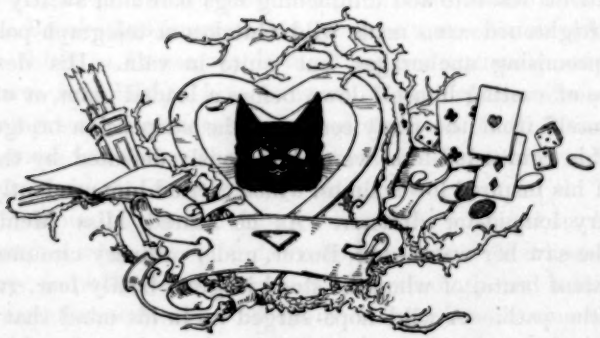
His frightened arms made wild clutches at telegraph poles and other promising anchorages, but quite in vain. His desperate purpose of casting himself down before a loaded team, or of hurling himself from the dizzy center of the suspension bridge, over which his course led him, were dexterously defeated by the cunning of his inspired lower limbs, which carried him prudently clear of every longed-for disaster. As he neared Miss Mehitable's house he saw her watch-dog, Boxer, under ordinary circumstances a truculent brute, of whom he stood in great bodily fear, running down the path. A wild hope surged up in his mind that Boxer might spring at his throat and, bearing him maimed and helpless to the earth, at least put a stop to this fearful progress. But no! the perverse brute only sniffed menacingly at his heels and urged him on still faster.

On, on he went, through the garden gate, up the long path between two high banks of snow as between the strong walls of a

prison, through the front door without even stopping to knock, and straight into Miss Mehitable's cozy front parlor, where she sat placidly knitting. And then and there his masterful legs wound up their awful performance by decisively plumping him down upon his knees before her in a position that admitted of but one explanation.

. . . . . .

In what precise terms John Poole made that explanation and what ensued thereupon are not known, nor would it be discreet or profitable to inquire. It may be fairly presumed that he did make it and that it was quite satisfactory to Miss Mehitable, from the circumstance that they were married early in the following spring, the Rev. Babblington Brooke coming down expressly to perform the ceremony.



A Frosty Morning.

BY RODRIGUES OTTOLENGUI.

"HEN as I understand it, you know that there is a thousand-pound note in this room, and yet you can't find it. In other words, Mr. Van Rawlston, you wish to know whether a thing can be lost when you know where it is."

The speaker's companion, a man of fifty, with the bearing of one accustomed to large affairs, frowned impatiently. A trusted and powerful financier, one grown gray in the management of huge interests, he chafed at the smallness of the mystery which yet seemed to reflect on his executorship of the estate to which the thousand-pound note belonged. And it was with some stiffness that he began: —

"Of course I understand that to a man of your experience this matter seems insignificant; but I am up to my ears in mystery. Mr. Barnes, the cleverest professional detective in New York, has spent hours in searching this room — without success. In despair I thought of you, with your cool, analytical brain, and I sent for you. But if you are in a jesting humor — "

"A thousand pardons," said the other, seating himself in the carved oak library chair. "That's one for each of your pounds. But there, forgive me and I will be serious. I received your note late because I did not reach home until dinner time. But here I am within half an hour of reading your message. Now, then, about this thousand pounds sterling. You are sure that the money is in this room? "

"Therein lies the mystery. I had it in my hands this morning and within a few minutes it had vanished."

"Seemed to have vanished, I presume you mean."

"There was no seeming about it. It was a single bank note and I placed it on this table. Five minutes later it had disappeared."

"Disappeared is a better word by long odds. That it passed out of your sight I can believe. The question is, how was this disappearance managed, for I do not believe that it was accidental. From what you say I deduce that two or more persons besides yourself were present at the time of said disappearance of said bank note. Am I correct?"

"There were three, but really I can't see how you guessed there was more than one person with me."

"It cannot be otherwise. Had there been only one person in the room with you, you would know absolutely that he took the note. That you have a doubt as to the identity of the culprit shows that you suspect one of two or more persons."

"Mitchel, I am delighted that I sent for you. You are exactly the man who will recover this money."

"What about Barnes? You mentioned his name."

"Yes, naturally my first thought was to send for a detective, and I remembered him in connection with that ruby robbery of yours which occurred at my house. He is now following a clue which he considers a good one, and will report during the evening."

"Good! Nothing would please me better than to succeed where Barnes fails. Every time I outwit him it is a feather in my cap, and another argument in favor of my theory that the professional detective is a much over-rated genius — but to your story, and be sure that you relate the exact circumstances of the affair."

As he finished speaking and leaned back in the padded library chair, the man's dark, clear-cut profile looked that of a scholar, an artist, anything but that of a detective. And indeed Mr. Robert Leroy Mitchel was both scholar and artist, — none the less so because of late years he had turned his trained powers of analysis to the study of crime and its motives, and to unraveling, as an amateur, certain mysterious offenses against the law, which had baffled the professional detective.

From cases involving life, death, millions of money or the jewels of a kingdom to the disappearance of a thousand-pound note might, indeed, have seemed a descent to the ordinary detective. Not so, however, to Mr. Mitchel, who valued mystery

not in proportion to the sum involved, but to the opportunity it gave for the exercise of subtle analysis. And certainly such opportunities seemed abundantly promised by the narrative whose details Mr. Van Rawlston now unfolded for the first time.

"Some thirty years or more ago," began Mr. Van Rawlston, "there came into my office a young Englishman, who introduced himself as Thomas Eggleston. The object of his visit was curious. He wished to borrow four thousand dollars upon collateral, which proved to be an English bank note for one thousand pounds; an odd request considering that he could have changed his note for American currency, but he explained that for sentimental reasons he did not wish to part with the note permanently. His expectation was to redeem it in the future, and to keep it as a memento, — the foundation of the fortune which he hoped to earn in this land."

"A singular wish," interrupted Mr. Mitchel.

"I should say so. Naturally my interest was keenly aroused. I agreed to advance the sum demanded, without charge. Moreover, I put him in the way of some speculations that turned out so well that it was not long before the thousand-pound note was back in his possession. Since then we have been close friends, I have visited him almost daily in this house, and when he died a few days ago, I was not surprised to find that he had named me as executor of his large estate."

"And the heirs?"

"I am coming to them presently. My friend died very unexpectedly," continued Mr. Van Rawlston. "Last Saturday he was well, and on Monday dead. Wednesday morning, the day of the funeral, his man of business brought me his client's will, and as the executor I appointed this morning for reading it, here in the library, to the family. This consisted of but two members. One was Alice Hetheridge, the daughter of a sister of Eggleston's who had accompanied him to this country and married here. As both Mrs. Hetheridge and her husband had died while their daughter was still a little girl, Alice had been brought up as her uncle's child, and it was expected would inherit his fortune. The only other relative present was Robert Eggleston, the nephew of the deceased, but practically a stranger to him, as he had never

been in this country nor even seen his uncle until he took up his abode in this house about three months ago."

"But you have mentioned only two relatives, and I understood you to say there was a third person present."

"And so there was. When I came I was surprised to find here Arthur Lumley, a young New Yorker, of whom I know nothing except that he is in love with Alice. But as Alice took me aside and explained that she had invited him, I was silenced.

"Now I come to the events of the day."

"Kindly be as explicit as possible," said Mr. Mitchel. "Omit no detail, however trifling."

"When we four had taken our places at this table I asked Alice, as being familiar with the house, to bring me a certain box named in the will. This she did. It was locked, the key having been brought to me with the will. Unlocking it, I took out a packet containing a bank note for a thousand pounds; the same upon which I had once loaned money. There were also some government bonds and railway securities. Having compared them with the list attached to the will, I then read aloud the testament of my dead friend. A part of this I will read to you as possibly shedding some light on the situation."

"One moment," interposed Mr. Mitchel; "you said that the packet taken from the box contained the bank note as well as the bonds and other securities. Are you sure the note was there?"

"Oh, yes! I found it first and placed it on the table in front of me, while I went through the papers and read the will. By this document, Robert Eggleston was made the heir of practically all his property, — a division that would have seemed decidedly unfair had it not been for the following paragraph."

Mr. Van Rawlston then proceeded to read an extract from the will, in which Eggleston explained why his beloved niece Alice was not made his heiress. In detail the writer related how, when he was a very young man, he had been left dependent on his half brother William, a man of wealth, ten years his senior; how this brother had paid his passage to this country and presented him with a thousand-pound note, on which the young fortune seeker had borrowed the money that became the nest egg of his present large estate; how William would never consent to a return of

the money, though his brother had preserved the original note with that end in view; and how, finally, the older brother had died suddenly, killed by the sweeping away of his entire fortune by unlucky speculation. The writer further stated that before his death William had given his son Robert a letter to his American uncle, claiming for that son a share of the fortune resulting from his father's gift.

In concluding, the writer said: —

"I took Robert into my home, and I am bound to say that I have not learned to love him. This, however, may be a prejudice, due to the fact that he had come between me and my wish to make Alice my heiress. In recognition of the possibility of this prejudice I feel compelled to ease my conscience by bequeathing to William's son the fortune which grew out of William's bounty. The original bank note, however, was a free gift to me, and I certainly may dispose of it as I please. I ask my niece Alice to accept it from me, as all that my conscience permits me to call my own."

"An interesting and curious statement," commented Mr. Mitchel. "Now tell me about the disappearance of the note."

"There is my difficulty. I have so little to tell. After reading the will, I laid it down, and reached out my hand, intending to give the bank note to Alice, whereupon I discovered that it had disappeared."

"Tell me exactly where each person was seated."

"We were all at this table, which you see is small. I sat at this end, Alice at my right hand, young Eggleston at my left, and Lumley opposite to me."

"So that all three were easily within reach of the bank note when you placed it upon the table? That complicates matters. Well, when you discovered that you could not find the note, who spoke first and what comment was made?"

"I cannot be certain. I was stunned, and the others seemed as much surprised as I was. I remember that Eggleston asked Alice whether she had picked it up, adding, 'It is yours, you know.' But she made an indignant denial. Lumley said nothing, but sat looking at us as though seeking an explanation. Then I recall that Eggleston made the very practical suggestion

that if each person in the room were searched and the note not found it would thus be proven that it had merely been blown from the table by some draught, in which case a thorough search should discover it. Once before, you may remember, I declined to have my guests searched, to my sorrow. It was at the time of the ruby robbery, when the suggestor himself had the jewel. Therefore when Eggleston made this suggestion I began with him. The search was thorough, I assure you, but I found nothing. I had as little success with Lumley, and I even examined my own pockets, with the vague hope that I might have inadvertently put the note in one of them. But all my looking was in vain."

"Might not one of these men have secreted the bank note elsewhere, and then have possessed himself of it after your search?"

"I took care to prevent that. As soon as I had gone through Eggleston, I unceremoniously bundled him out of the room. I did the same with Lumley, and neither has been allowed in here since."

"What about the young lady?"

"It would be absurd to suspect her. The note was her property. Still she insisted upon my searching her, and I examined her pocket. Of course I found nothing."

"Ah! You examined only her pocket. Well, under the circumstances, I suppose that was all you could do. Thus, having sent the three persons out of the room, you think that the bank note is still here. A natural deduction, only I wish that the woman might have been more thoroughly searched. By the way, you said that Mr. Barnes assisted you in examining the room for the note. What view does he take of the case?"

Before Mr. Van Rawlston could reply there was a sharp ring at the door bell, and a moment later Mr. Barnes himself was ushered in, by his appearance completing a trio often before met together for the unraveling of mysteries.

As usual, his coming was the signal for a battle of wits between the professional detective and the expert criminologist, each bent on demonstrating the superiority of his method.

To-day the detective seemed for the time in the ascendant. With what appeared the authority of knowledge, he ridiculed Mr.

Mitchel's theory that the case was a complex one, and proceeded, point by point, to state the steps that led to his view of the case.

They were, first, that the note was either mislaid or stolen; second, that if mislaid it would have been found, and that therefore it was stolen; third, that if stolen it was taken by one of the three persons; and fourth, that as one of the three owned the note, and another had just heard of the inheritance of a large fortune, the third by necessity came under suspicion.

To this conclusion, however, Mr. Mitchel, acquiescent up to this point, took strong exceptions. For in the first place, he said, people had been known to steal their own goods; in the second place, rich men were often thieves; and in the third place, Mr. Lumley, being in love with the owner of the note, was as unlikely to steal it as was she herself. One point only he would concede, that Lumley might have stolen the note before he heard that his sweetheart was to inherit it; in which case, of course, he might have desired to return it and yet not had the opportunity. In that event, however, the question arose how he could get out of the room with the stolen property.

"He must have hidden it elsewhere than in his pocket," said Mr. Barnes. "Remember that you cannot thoroughly search a man in the presence of a lady. At any rate I have strong grounds for believing that he stole the note, as you shall hear."

His narrative seemed indeed to support his theory beyond the shadow of doubt. For by following Mr. Lumley, after he had left the house, he had discovered that this impecunious lover of Alice Hetheridge went straight to his employer and resigned his position, and then betook himself to a business agency where he obtained an option to purchase a partnership in a good concern, agreeing to pay five thousand dollars for the same. From there Mr. Barnes had tracked him to the New York Central Station, whence the young man had left the city about two hours before.

"What his destination was I don't know." the detective concluded, "but one of my men who was stationed there is following him, and will report to me in" — pulling out his watch — "in half an hour, so I have no time to lose."

As the detective left the room, Mr. Mitchel, unruffled by Mr. Barnes's apparent victory, turned to his friend with a strange

request. This was no other than that he might spend the night in the library that had been the scene of the strange robbery, and that his presence should be concealed from Eggleston and Miss Hetheridge.

Van Rawlston looked at his friend inquiringly.

"I see," he said finally, "you wish to make a search on your own account, eh? Very good; I will arrange it. And, by the way, as there's to be an auction sale of the library to-morrow — Eggleston had arranged for it before his death — you'll see the necessity of settling this mystery as soon as possible. Meantime, as it's nine o'clock and I need rest, I'll go home, meeting you here in the morning."

Before going, however, Mr. Van Rawlston took time to find out that Eggleston was not in the house and that Miss Hetheridge was in her room. Then he dismissed the servant and locked Mr. Mitchel in the library. Next he went upstairs to Miss Hetheridge, told her that he had thought best to lock the library door, and bade her good night. Passing out to the street, he handed the door key to Mr. Mitchel through the front window.

Left thus alone in a strange house, Mr. Mitchel dropped into an easy chair and began to analyze the situation. He did not light the gas, as that would have betrayed his presence, but the glowing grate fire shed light enough for him to get the lay of the land, to note that the long library occupied the whole of one side of the house, the parlors being on the opposite side of the hallway, and that the windows in front overlooked the street, and at the back opened upon a small yard. He even took the pains to find out that just below these back windows stood a shed, the roof of an extension which served as a laundry.

Then returning to his seat, Mr. Mitchel went over in his mind the incidents which had been related to him, and two of his conclusions are worthy of note here.

"Barnes argues," thought he, "that Lumley may have taken the bank note before he knew that it had been bequeathed to his sweetheart. But the same holds good with the girl herself, and might well explain her stealing what was really her own property. That is one point worth bearing in mind, but the best of all is my scheme for finding the note itself. Why should I trouble myself

with a search which might occupy me all night, when by waiting I may see the thief take the note from its present hiding place, always supposing that it is in this room? Decidedly patience is a virtue in this instance, and I have only to wait."

A couple of hours later, Mr. Mitchel started up from a slight doze, and realized that he had been disturbed, though at first he could not tell by what. Then he heard a sound which indicated that some one was fitting a key into the lock. Perhaps the thief was coming! This thought awakened him to his full faculties, and he quickly hid among the folds of some heavy draperies which served upon occasion to divide the room into two apartments. The door opened, and he heard the stealthy tread of soft footsteps, though at first the figure of the intruder was hidden from his view by the draperies which surrounded him. In a few moments his suspense was at an end. A young woman, of girlish figure, passed by him and went over to the fireplace. She was in a dainty night-robe, her long black hair hanging in waving masses down her back. She leaned against the mantel and gazed into the fire without moving for some minutes, and then, turning suddenly, crossed the room, going directly to one of the bookshelves. Here she paused, then took down several books which she placed upon a chair near by. Her back was towards Mr. Mitchel, but he could see her reach into the recess with her arm, which was bared by the act, the loose sleeve of her gown falling aside. Then there was a clicking sound just perceptible to the ear, and Mr. Mitchel muttered to himself: —

"A secret closet, with a spring catch."

In another moment the girl was replacing the books, and, this done, she hurried from the library locking the door after her. Mr. Mitchel emerged from his hiding place, and going to the shelf where the girl had been, removed the books and searched for the spring which would unlock the secret compartment. It was not easily found; but Mr. Mitchel was a patient and persistent man, and after nearly an hour discovered the way of moving a sliding panel, and took an envelope from the recess behind. Carrying this to the fireplace, he dropped to his knees, and withdrawing its contents, held in his hand a Bank of England note for one thousand pounds. He looked at it, smiled, and said in a low tone: —

"And Mr. Barnes was so certain that he would catch the thief!" Then he smiled again, replaced the books on the shelf, decided that the large sofa might serve as a comfortable bed, and so went to sleep.

He was awakened early, by a sense of cold. Starting up, for a moment dazed by his unfamiliar surroundings, he gazed first at the gray ashes of the dead fire in the grate, and then looked towards the windows thickly covered with frost, and shivered. Remembering where he was, he threw his arms about, and walked up and down the long room to start his blood moving, and induce a little warmth. Presently he went to the back windows and looked at the beautiful arabesques of frost, which resembled long fern leaves. Suddenly he seemed unusually interested, and especially attracted to one of the panes. He examined this closely, and taking a note book from his pocket made a rapid sketch of the pattern on the glass. Then he raised the sash, looked out upon the shed, and emitted a low whistle. Next he stepped out through the window, went down on his hands and knees upon the tinned roof, and looked closely at something which he saw there. Returning to the room, he proceeded to the most curious act of all. He again opened the secret panel, replaced the envelope containing the bank note, and seated himself at the table where Mr. Van Rawlston claimed that the note had vanished, and in the chair where Mr. Van Rawlston had been when he read the will.

Several hours later, when Mr. Van Rawlston came in, Mr. Mitchel was sitting in the same chair looking through a Bible.

"Well," said Mr. Van Rawlston, "how did you pass the night? Did the thief pay you a visit?"

"I think so," replied Mr. Mitchel.

"Then you know who took the note?" asked Mr. Van Rawlston eagerly.

"Perhaps! I do not like to jump at conclusions. This is a magnificent Bible, Mr. Van Rawlston. Is it in the sale to-day? If so, I think I will bid on it."

"Oh, yes, it is to be sold," replied Mr. Van Rawlston testily. He thought Mr. Mitchel merely wished to change the subject, and at that moment he was more interested in bank notes than in Bibles.

He had no idea that Mr. Mitchel really coveted the Bible. But then he did not know that Mr. Mitchel collected books as well as gems.

He was therefore much astonished, some hours later, when the auction was in progress, to find Mr. Mitchel not only bidding on the Bible, but bidding heavily.

At first the bidding was spiritless, and the price rose slowly until Mr. Mitchel made an offer of five hundred dollars. After a moment's hesitation young Eggleston bid fifty dollars more, and it was seen that the contest was now between him and Mr. Mitchel. Bidding fifty dollars at a time they had advanced the price to nine hundred dollars, when Eggleston remarked: —

"I bid nine fifty," then turned to Mr. Mitchel and added: —

"This is a family relic, sir, and I hope you will not raise me again."

"This is an open sale, I believe," said Mr. Mitchel, bowing coldly. "I offer a thousand dollars."

"One thousand and fifty," added Eggleston quickly.

At this moment Mr. Barnes entered the room, accompanied by a short young man, and Mr. Mitchel's attention seemed attracted away from the Bible. The auctioneer noticing this, called him by name and asked if he wished to bid again.

"One moment, please," said Mr. Mitchel. "May I look again at the volume?"

It was passed to him, and he appeared to scrutinize it closely, started slightly as though making a discovery, and handed it back, saying: —

"I have made a mistake. I supposed that this was a genuine Soncino, but I find that it is only a reprint." Then he turned to Eggleston with a curious smile and said, "You may have the family relic. I shall not bid against you."

The auction over, the crowd dispersed, and when all strangers had departed, Mr. Mitchel nodded meaningly to Mr. Barnes, and approached young Eggleston, who was tying up the Bible in paper. Touching him upon the arm he said very quietly: —

"Mr. Eggleston, I must ask the officer here to arrest you!"

Eggleston's hands quivered over the knot, and he seemed too agitated to speak. The detective, realizing that Mr. Mitchel had solved the problem, quickly stepped closer to Eggleston.

"What does this mean?" asked Mr. Van Rawlston.

"Call Miss Hetheridge and I will explain," said Mr. Mitchel.

"No! No! Not before her!" cried Eggleston, breaking down completely. "I confess I loved Alice and wished to make it impossible for her to marry Lumley. The note is here! Here, in the Bible. I stole it and hid it there!" With nervous fingers he tore off the wrappings, and rapidly turning the pages searched for the note. "Heavens! It is not here!" He looked at Mr. Mitchel anxiously.

"No! It is not there. You paid too much for that Bible. Mr. Van Rawlston, I prefer to have the lady called, if you please."

Mr. Van Rawlston left the room, and Mr. Mitchel addressed Mr. Barnes.

"By the way, Barnes, have you abandoned your theory?"

"I suppose I must now, though I had not up to a moment ago. By the aid of my man I found Mr. Lumley, and accused him of the theft. He would offer no explanation, but willingly agreed to return with me."

"We seem to have arrived just in time," said Mr. Lumley quietly.

"In the very nick of time, as you shall hear," said Mr. Mitchel. "Ah! Here is Miss Hetheridge. Will you be seated, please, Miss Hetheridge." He bowed courteously as the young woman sat down, and then proceeded.

"I did not think that the bank note had been removed from this room. Why? Because I argued that the theft and the hiding must have necessarily occupied but a moment; a chosen moment when the attention of all three others was attracted away from the table where it lay. The one chance was that Miss Hetheridge might have hidden it in the folds of her gown. The men's pockets seemed too inaccessible. I agreed with Mr. Barnes that the lady would scarcely steal what was her own, though even that was possible if she did not know that it was to be hers. For a similar reason, I did not suspect Mr. Lumley, and thus by elimination, there was but one person left upon whom to fasten suspicion. I supposed he would return here during the night to recover the bank note, and I remained in this room to watch for him."

At this Miss Hetheridge made a movement of her lips as though about to speak, b .t no words escaped, and she shrank back in her chair.

"During the night," proceeded Mr. Mitchel, "Miss Hetheridge came into this room and hid something. After she had left the room, relocking the door with a duplicate key, I found what she had hidden. It was a one-thousand pound note."

There was silence for a moment, then Miss Hetheridge cried out: —

"I can explain!"

"That is why I sent for you," said Mr. Mitchel.

"The note was my own," said the girl, speaking rapidly, "but after the disappearance of the other I was afraid to have it in my room lest it be found, and seem to inculpate me. I received it only a few days before my dear uncle died. He told me that his brother William had sent it as a present to my mother upon her marriage, but as he had doubted the good intentions of my father, he had kept the matter a secret. As both my parents died, he had held the note in trust for me. He did not invest it, because he thought that his own fortune would be an ample legacy to leave me. A short time before he died I passed my twenty-first birthday, and he gave me the note. That is the whole truth."

"To which I can testify," interjected Mr. Lumley. "And I may now add that Miss Hetheridge had not only promised to be my wife, but she offered me the use of her money to buy the partnership, which to Mr. Barnes seemed such a suspicious act."

"I have only to explain, then," continued Mr. Mitchel, "how it was that I decided that Miss Hetheridge was not a thief. This morning I found heavy frost on the window panes. Upon one, however, I noticed a circular, transparent spot, where the pattern of the frosting had been obliterated. Instantly I comprehended what had occurred. The thief, the real thief, had come in the night, or rather in the morning, for I know almost the hour. He stood upon the shed outside, and melted the frost by breathing upon the pane, with his mouth close to the glass. Thus making a peep-hole, he must have seen me asleep on the sofa, and so knew that it would be useless for him to attempt an entrance. As the person who did this trick stood upon the shed, I had but

to measure the distance from the shed to his peep-hole to be able to guess his height, which I estimated to be more than six feet. Next there was some very interesting evidence in the frost on the tin roof, — the marks made by the man's feet, or his heels rather, for the frost was so light that only the impressions of the nails in the heels would show. My own made complete little horse-shoe-shaped marks, composed of dots. But those of my predecessor were scarcely more than half a curve, which proved that he walks on the side of his foot, thus slightly lifting the opposite side from the ground, or roof, as it was in this instance. This much decided me that Miss Hetheridge was not the thief, and I returned her bank note to the place where she had hidden it. Then I sat at the table where the will was read, and studied the situation. The easiest way to hide the note quickly seemed to be to slip it into the Bible which stood on the table. Therefore I was not surprised when I found the bank note, which I have here."

He drew forth the bank note from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Van Rawlston, who asked: —

"But why, then, did you try to buy the Bible?"

"I had no idea of doing so. You forget that I had not seen Mr. Lumley. He, too, might have been six feet high, and he, too, might have had the habit of walking on the side of his heel, as I quickly observed that Mr. Eggleston does. With only one of the men before me I decided to run up the price of the Bible, knowing that if he were guilty he would bid over me. Mr. Eggleston followed my lead, and I was almost sure of his guilt until he made the remark that he was buying a family relic. It was a possible truth, and I was obliged to go on bidding, to see how anxious he was to possess the volume. Then, as I said awhile ago, Mr. Lumley arrived in the nick of time. One glance at his short stature, and I was ready to let the Bible go."

"You said you could almost tell the hour at which this man peeped through the window," said Mr. Barnes.

"Ah, I see! You want me to teach you tricks in your own trade, eh? Well, frost forms on a window pane when the thermometer is near or below thirty-two On the wall here I found a recording thermometer, which discloses the fact that at three

o'clock this morning the temperature was as high as forty-five, while at four it was below thirty. Frost began to form between those hours. At five it was so cold, twenty degrees, that I awoke. Our man must have come between half past four and five Had he come before then, his peep-hole would have been fully covered again with frost, whereas it was but thinly iced over, the mere freezing of the water of the melted frost, there being no design, or pattern, as there was over every other part of the window pane So I may offer you a new version of an old saw, and say that, "Frost shows which way a thief goes."

The Company Feud.

BY WILLIAM H. WASSELL, U. S. A.

HEN private Murphy of F company was backed by his followers to race with private Johnson of E company, no one dreamed of the complications that were to follow. For a long time Johnson had been the fleetest man in the garrison, and E company had gloried in his powers. They boasted about him; they smiled indulgently when a man of another company was spoken of as a runner. They said that E company was the best company in the regiment; and as there was some foundation for their claim, the boasts ruffled the spirits of the men of F company, because they also laid claims to superiority.

One day a recruit came to F company. He was a well-built fellow, and it soon leaked out that he was fleet of foot. F company took him out on the prairie, measured off a hundred yards, started him with a blank cartridge, and timed him with the best watch in the company. Then they danced back to barracks and laughed E company in the face. And E company jeered back at them, and sent F company a challenge,— the men to run for all the money the two companies would draw on their next pay day. This was more than F company had bargained for, but they had confidence in their man, and the challenge was accepted.

The garrison never forgot that race. Like unleashed hounds the two runners shot from the mark; not a breath was drawn by either E company or F company as the contestants tore down the track side by side. Then a mighty cheer went up from E company as, at the finish, their man forged ahead and won by a yard! How they screamed and hugged each other! And they carried private Johnson back to barracks; they thought too much of him to allow him to walk.

F company remained sober to a man on that pay day. Of course it was different in E company; their men marched out to

parade like an awkward squad of recruits; their guides could not see the guides in front, and therefore made no attempt to cover them; some of their men had fines ranging from fifty cents to five dollars. But these trifles were not balm to the drooping spirits and empty pockets of F company. As was remarked by an E company high private, who for much inebriety and unmilitary conduct in barracks had forfeited five soldier dollars back to the government that paid him, "It cuts no figure with me. A nice easy man in F company is paying me blind and giving me a trifling matter of eight dollars to boot."

The longer F company thought about it, the madder they got. They paid their bets like men, but they remembered their old score and lived in the hope of settling it, for company pride is not to be laid low without thought of the morrow. Day by day F company racked its brains to get ahead of E company, but E company was always on the alert. The spirit of rivalry soon spread upward and entered the hearts of the respective captains and first lieutenants of the two companies. So strong was it that it even made an impression on the self-satisfied second lieutenants, and finally entered into the portly forms of the battalion commanders, for the companies belonged to different battalions. In the officers' club, rye was never so sweet to the captain of E company as when fate, by cards or dice, decided that the check should be signed by the captain of F company. And down on Soap Sud Row, Mrs. Sergeant Junkler, a military attachment to F company, laughed until her fat sides ached when the wind blew down a fresh washing hung up by Mrs. Corporal Thomlins,— not because she disliked Mrs. Thomlins, but because Mrs. Thomlins's man belonged to E company.

The cinder track origin of the feud had been all but lost in a larger and more comprehensive rivalry, when one fine morning the colonel ordered the ambulance to meet the early P and T train. In it went the colonel and the colonel's wife, and an escort wagon trailed behind. An hour later, when the escort wagon pulled up in front of the colonel's quarters, it carried three large trunks, of an unmistakably feminine aspect, which immediately invested the accompanying ambulance with breathless and absorbing interest. With a due sense of the dramatic

value of the situation the colonel emerged first from the vehicle, hopping forth as spry as a yearling colt on branding day. After a moment of suspense he extended one martial arm and perfunctorily assisted Mrs. Colonel to alight, and then the old martinet, stretching out both arms and ignoring the ambulance steps, fairly lifted his pretty niece to the ground. For he was a true soldier, and the niece was so sweet that, twenty-four hours afterward, her heart, hand, and dainty smile were all violently besieged by the respective second lieutenants of companies E and F.

And then the company fight found a fresh inspiration, and was waged for all it was worth.

When the F company second lieutenant was allowed to take her sweetness to the first post hop following her arrival, the hearts of the men who slept on iron bunks in F company were full of rejoicing. They knew of their second lieutenant's good luck almost as soon as he did; for, of course, the colonel's second girl heard the matter discussed as she was doing her dusting, had promptly reported it to the cook, the cook in confidence had told the man who brought the commissaries, and he had told a friend in F company. When the army back door telegraph line has made its connections, nothing can equal its rapidity of service or its volume of reliable news.

When the second lieutenant of E company stood highest in favor, E company knew it at once through a similar channel, and proceeded in a body to the canteen as a consequence. When the second lieutenant of F company, in a happy inspiration at early morning drill, marched the company past the colonel's quarters nine times, giving loud commands at each passing, the men caught the idea, and even old Jerry Andrews, with twenty-four years of service in his stooped shoulders, braced so hard that he was sore for a week.

The colonel's orderly was daily chosen from either the E or the F company detail. No other men marching on guard stood the ghost of a chance in this competition, for each of the two companies sent out guard details that were dadyocked and heelbored until they made the adjutant blink as he inspected them. And it was a memorable day in the annals of E company when an E company man as orderly, spick and span and polished from head

to foot, held the prancing horse of his second lieutenant while the lieutenant, in uniform that was new from cap to boot, ran up the walk and porch steps to take Miss Wilckens out for an afternoon canter.

On that same day F company resolved that if their second lieutenant proved the winner, the wedding present would cost the company a month's pay, even if the pay day after the wedding should find them all sober as an awful consequence. But this idea incidentally recalled a former pay day that had been also sober, and thereupon they said unpleasant things about E company. When a soldier says unpleasant things it is best not to repeat them, at least not on the page that contains a young girl's name.

But this is not a story of the loves of two second lieutenants. Absorbing as was the competition into which these officers of E and F companies respectively had entered, and ardent as was the passion that inspired it, neither have more than an incidental interest in this tale. That these particular second lieutenants, with the impetuosity of their grade, had, from private motives of whatever dignity and value, accidentally entered into the post fight upon opposite sides is alone important.

One October morning, the sentinel in rear of officers' line saw flames bursting from the roof of the colonel's quarters.

"Fire, number three!" he yelled, at the same time firing his rifle.

The stillness of the autumnal morning was gone. Bugles blew, the reveille gun was fired, soldiers tumbled out of barracks, officers dropped their cards or their babies. The deserted parade was at once alive with men and littered fire buckets, with hose carts and with ladders.

The second lieutenants of companies E and F rushed out of the colonel's house together. Between them was Miss Wilckens, but which one carried her, or whether neither or both of them enjoyed this privilege, not even the colonel's cook could tell. They left her reluctantly on the sidewalk, and each, with a parting look of undying love, faily flew across the parade to conduct his own command to the scene of danger. The first sergeants met them half way with the hastily formed companies, and back

again they madly raced to the burning house, easily beating all competitors in a dead heat for first place.

In every well-conducted garrison each company is assigned a fire duty. Some bring the ladders, others the hose, and others, still, fire buckets. For the latter duty were detailed companies E and F; but finding no water for their buckets, they were ordered into the quarters to carry out the colonel's belongings. With F company rushed its second lieutenant. A moment later he hurried forth bearing a divan pillow under each arm, and his eyes caught the second lieutenant of E company not only calmly standing on the sidewalk with Miss Wilckens, but actually wrapping his cape around her. A moment later the girl's pretty shoulders were covered with another second lieutenant's cape, and from that time on companies E and F worked without their junior officers.

The colonel's quarters were old, and the puny streams of water that were thrown upon the blaze seemed but to double the anger of the flames. The little tongue of fire on the roof grew in spite of all effort to subdue it, until the attics were a seething mass. Black clouds of smoke poured from the second-story windows, and a regiment of men stood by, anxious, willing, yet powerless — company E and company F close to the building, each longing for a first chance at anything.

Among Miss Wilckens's possessions was a maid, and just as the second lieutenants of companies E and F simultaneously asked to be allowed to do something — anything — in her behalf, Miss Wilckens suddenly exclaimed: —

"Oh, where's Baker? Where's Baker?"

"Miss Wilckens's maid!" chorused the second lieutenants.

That was enough for F company, and more than enough for E company. With just a second's start E company rushed again into the burning building, up the stairway, through a rain of water from the hose that could attain no greater height, to grope through smoke and flame for the missing maid. Having started ahead of F company, they blocked the doorway and packed the stairway so that not a man of that hated body, except little Dorgan, the recruit, could get into the house.

If there were a chance for advancement E company wanted it

all to themselves. The leading men stumbled through the rooms in mad search, while the others stood on the stairway ready to lower the maid's unconscious form with due gentleness down from her fiery danger.

The smoke was suffocating, and E company gasped for breath but manfully held to its task. Flames darted out from all parts of the second floor, but E company gave no thought to its singed hairs and blackened faces. But where was the girl? Was all their search to be in vain?

"Where is she? Which is her room?"

And as the flames raged with an ever-increasing ferocity, the waiting crowd of soldiers felt the premonition of death in their hearts.

Suddenly a cheer broke from some one in the burning building. They had found her! The hoarse, smoke-choked cheer ran through the men on the stairway, swelling louder and louder, until the outsiders caught it and sent it back to the rescuers — a roar of applause for their bravery.

Ever so gently the sweaty arms on the stairway stretched out to receive the unconscious form, thoughtfully wrapped in woolen blankets; carefully, yet quickly, they passed her down.

Was she burned? Where was the doctor? Give her air. Get her away from that building.

And another cheer was given, a cheer for E company. And to their lasting credit be it said that F company started the cheer.

As the six bearers with their unconscious burden reached the sidewalk, Miss Wilckens glanced away from the fire up along the line of officers' quarters. Then she gave a little shriek: "There's Baker! She wasn't in the fire at all!" and promptly fainted in the arms of both second lieutenants.

At the same moment there was a lively scrambling in the woolen blankets. A second later, little Dorgan, the F company recruit, was sprinting across the parade as though the legions of Satan were after him.

"Much obliged to E company!" he yelled as he ran. "I knew she wasn't in the fire! I knew it all the time! But much obliged to E company for carrying an F company man so nice!"

. . . . . .

Little Dorgan got six months in the guard house, but he is F company's hero. A week after the fire, a tall "cit" came out from the East. He did not know the difference between "fours right" and "fours left," but he knew how to put a solitaire ring on the proper finger of Miss Wilckens's pretty left hand. The second lieutenants of companies E and F simultaneously applied for leaves of absence.

A laugh is better than all else, so to be laughed at is worse than all else; therefore F company came out of the company feud with flying colors.

The Wisdom of Solomon.

BY G. B. DUNHAM.

UE westward, on a heavy grade, the Overland climbs toward the backbone of the continent. If you travel that way in the early spring you may notice the birds and the flowers of the lower altitudes growing fewer and smaller as your train ascends to the mountains. The green turf gives way to brown, patches of white appear among the prickly pear by the roadside, and that jack-rabbit crouching near the soiled and shrunken core of a winter's drift, and flattening his ears along his back as the train rolls by, still wears his coat a shade whiter than the earthy snow. The air grows keen, and unless you happen to be to the manner born you are sure to wish that the man in the opposite seat would draw in his head and shut the window.

When the man finally does so it is to remark, "I can see the gap."

Other windows will go up, and other men will look out; a general interest and satisfaction will pervade the car. You, also, will presently look out, and if your eyes are really good, will see far ahead, with the line of road running plump into it, a cleft in the mountain range.

The great hills present to the eye no other break than this one — apparently made on purpose to let the railroad through. But, as you learn later in the day, the road does not go through, for after panting, like an overheated hound, all the way up the slope to the very threshold of the pass, your engine, merely pausing for a deep drink beside a foamy brook, turns sharply to the right and speeds along refreshed over an easy grade parallel to the mountains.

During the brief stop made by the train your car has been half emptied. All those men whose conversation has been of ranches

and ranges, saddles and spurs, are left behind. This is Rocky Creek. The cowboys who went East in the fall came to the railroad through the pass with the last beef drive of the season, chilled and disgusted. They swore great oaths never to tighten a cinch again, and sold their outfits to Jud Bristol for a song — or, at the most, a song and dance. Now they are coming back in shoals.

Bill Field and half a dozen of his fellows left the train on such an afternoon, and lined up on the platform to watch it away. That duty discharged, they felt as tired and thirsty as though they had helped to pull the cars up the long hill, and with a common impulse turned toward the buildings across the track.

Rocky Creek is not much of a town to look at — Cook's tourists don't stop there — but it ships more stock than any other three stations on the road. It is a straggling row of irregular wooden buildings along a single street facing the railroad. At the end of the row are the stock yards, large pens for handling and loading cattle. They are extensive and well built, cover more ground than the town, and the general effect given is that the stores and saloons are a suburb of the yards.

The homing cowboys turned their steps toward the general store of Jud Bristol. This store had long been one of the institutions of the town. Built two stories high in front, successive low additions made as business increased had extended back two hundred feet. Some parts were of redwood, some of pine and sheet iron; all were unpainted and weather-beaten. A sign had at one time reached across the front reading, "Groceries, Dry Goods & C." When the committee attempted to hang a superfluous citizen there, it broke in the middle, one end came down and was never replaced. The present reading — Goods & C — has been generally interpreted to mean "goods and credit." Within this ridiculous old shell was a complete department store, with a saloon annex, and a blacksmith shop and stock corral adjunct.

"Hello! a new sign," said Bill, as they came opposite; "Jud is putting on airs."

"Changed his name, too," said another; "he spells it 'A. Solomon. — Buys and Sells Everything.'"

"I can speak three languages," remarked bewildered Bill,

"American, English, and profane, but I can't get hold of a word that fits the occasion."

"Well, come along into the synagogue," urged Jo; "we got to have the liquor anyhow."

In the saloon annex the boys took the usual and made their inquiries about the former proprietor.

"Jud has gone broke," said the artist who mixes; "collections were a little slow, and the sheenies came down on him and closed him out. That gent over there in long whiskers corralled the whole outfit."

"I owe Jud about seven dollars, myself," said Bill, adding amiably as he chewed his liquor: "If things were like they used to be in this country we could pour coal oil on them whiskers and set 'em afire. No *sense* in shutting Jud off. Why, he was the most accommodating dealer that ever was; used to buy my saddle and togs every fall when I quit, and pay me the cash. Sell 'em to me again on credit in the spring."

With this tribute to the character of the late proprietor, Field dismissed the subject and ordered the score charged up to himself.

"That don't go," said the artist; "new boss don't keep a slate."

"It's got to go," retorted Bill; "I ain't off the range, nor just back from Klondike. I been East all winter."

Bill was crossed again by the new management when he tried to buy back his last year's saddle and outfit on the usual terms. The proprietor politely and decidedly declined to sell him goods for any other consideration than spot cash, and was quite unmoved when Bill repeated to him the regret already expressed to the barkeeper, that the changing times no longer countenanced the use of kerosene and matches as a vermicide.

"Have you lost any trouble?" asked Bill. "Because if you have," he added, "I should think you would find it right here, and pretty quick, too."

William Field was not a desperado. He belonged to a class of young men who come from country homes in the East to work on the cattle ranges, and who consider themselves amenable to no law but force after they get west of the 103d meridian. They are good boys, but the light air turns their heads a trifle, and they

own the earth. The men who own merely the flocks and herds, the stores and railroads, are there by sufferance. All that ails Bill and his fellows is the free life of the range; they have too much their own way, and any woman can tell you that is not good for any man.

Bill quitted the store too mad to take a parting drink of coal-tar whisky, went to a lodging house, took a room and went to bed. The whole town went early to bed in the spring time. Frontier towns are virtuous when they are poor. When shipping time comes round, and the pens are full of cattle and the boys have got their wages burning holes in their pockets,— "that is another story."

Bill went to bed, and the little bad whisky he had taken went to his head. He had a vivid and startling dream. When he awoke he was out on the street, dressed, with his shoes in his hand. As he gazed stupidly about, unable for the moment to collect his thoughts, bright lights flared up in the windows of Solomon's store, and there was a cry of "Fire!"

His dream! The shoes dropped from his hand, and joining the cry, Bill dashed down the street to where Mr. Solomon, half dressed and weeping, stood wringing his hands.

"My Gott," he moaned, "I'm a ruined man!" The fire had already made much headway. Men gathered quickly. Some broke in doors and windows and brought out a few goods. A bucket brigade was formed and passed up water from the creek, but soon gave up a hopeless task. There seemed nothing to do but watch the big shed filled with half the county's supplies go up in the smoke. The fire was fiercest at the back, but very rapidly eating toward the front of the building, and the outside stairs leading to Solomon's living rooms were burning. Suddenly a child's face appeared at an upper window. She vainly tried to raise the sash.

"My Gott! Rachel!" screamed the old man. "I thought she was at the hotel."

Bill Field was as vigorous in action as in speech. He made a break for the stairway and went up through the flames, broke in the doors, knocked out the sash, dropped the child from the window to those below, and fell out after it.

It was a foolish act, because the window was but fifteen feet from the ground, and some one might have found a ladder, set it up at the front of the house, and saved the child before she strangled in the smoke. But the people cheered Bill just as hard as though he had done a noble thing, and he owned the town that night.

It was at first thought that Bill had received no more serious injuries than the bruises resulting from his fall, but the smoke and flame inhaled on the stairway soon made their effects so felt that he was put to bed in great pain. His lifelong friend, Jo Thornton, stayed with him and put all the other fellows out. The doctor said he might live a couple of days.

On the last day he asked to see Solomon. The merchant came to the room and the bedside, expressing profuse gratitude for the saving of his daughter.

"The fire has taken half my money," he said, "but I'll use the other half to see you through."

"Mr. Solomon," said Bill faintly, and wasting no words, "I was awfully mad at you, and I think I must have gone crazy that night," pulling himself together with a great effort; "I — fired your store."

Jo was leaning over him as he spoke, and for one instant was dazed. Then he burst out, "Bill, you lie! He lies, I tell you," repeated Jo, turning fiercely on Solomon, and dragging him out of the room. "He lies. I did it myself."

After the funeral the efficient sheriff of the county took charge of Jo. He admitted having made the confession, and the same newspaper which carried to their boyhood home the story of Bill Field's heroism and death reported the sentence for arson of Jo Thornton. The few persons who knew about the scene in Bill's room said that "probably both men were in it."

All but A. Solomon. He did not talk for publication, but, over and over, to himself he whispered: —

"My Gott! My Gott! And I did it myself to get the insurance."

The Bijou Bride.

BY GEORGE B. DUNHAM.

HE was a Denver schoolma'am, and when Clarence Marsh married her and took her to the ranch on Bijou Creek, there was not another woman within twenty miles. This was in '77. Some years later I knew Marsh very well, and he told me about her.

"She only stayed with me a year," said he, "and I reckon not many would have stayed as long as that. Women want neighbors, and ranchmen don't. If you've got a bunch of cattle or a band of sheep you've got to have all the range you can get; and if it's ten miles to the next ranch, so much the better for both of you.

"Wool was cash in those days, and thirty cents a pound. Milly had everything she wanted only society (at least, I thought so then). Once in a while we went to Denver for a couple of days, and often the L. C. boys would come over to our place in the evening. Henry and I played cards a lot, and Freel would sing or talk with Milly. I don't sing a little bit, but I thought my wife's singing was the sweetest music on earth. I think so yet. Those boys never came to the ranch much before I was married, but afterward they came a lot. Henry was real smart and I had to stop playing with him, but Freel was no good — didn't know a Lincoln sheep from a Shropshire. But he could sing, and my wife liked him, and bimeby I told her she liked him too well, and I told him to clear out and not come around any more for a spell. And we was all mad, and Milly cried a lot, and I acted like a regular fool, which I surely am when I'm mad — and the next day was the big blizzard.

"Do you remember the big blizzard of '77? It was the day before Christmas. You would remember it if, like me, you had been caught out in it with a band of sheep. One of the herders

had to go to town for his holiday drunk, and on that morning I took a band out south about two miles, and when the storm came I couldn't get back. I thought my time had come, sure, for the morning had been so warm that I had no overcoat, and the weather changed from summer to winter in a holy minute.

"Well, it snowed and blowed great guns all day, getting colder and colder, and I stayed with the sheep. After we had drifted with the storm for several miles, and half a day, me afighting them back, and them acrowding me down the wind all the time, I got the band into a deep arroyo, where the dogs could hold them. Then I skinned a couple of sheep and wrapped up in the pelts. The storm quit about dark, and I stayed there all night. You never saw so much snow! There were drifts thirty feet high and hard enough to carry a horse, while the hills and mesas were blown bare.

"Come morning, I strung out the flock and started them home on the run. Got there by 10 o'clock and found the place deserted. I thought for a minute that my wife must be under a snowdrift, and I tell you I was just about locoed, rushing about from house to barn. But when I found that her horse and saddle was gone, and something from the house too, then it came to me all of a sudden about the row with Freel, and I knew she had gone off of her own free will, and would never come back any more. And it didn't take me long to make up my mind that she'd run away with Freel Harlow.

"You want to remember that I had been most froze to death, had nothing to eat for a day and a night, and my judgment wasn't just quite so good as it was quick. So I saddled up and rode over to the L. C., across the drifts; the horse got stuck in a snowbank, and I left him and went in on foot. And there was Henry all alone, writing a letter. And I asked him where was Freel? (I told him I was up to his game, and he needn't waste any time trying to fool me.) And he said Freel was gone to Denver and I could go to the devil, and before we got through talking I missed him twice, and he shot me through the leg.

"Henry took care of me until they got a doctor and a nurse from town, and I was moved home. I was pretty weak for a while, and had to stay in bed for a fortnight. I had time to do a